Creation Festival Radio Special

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Brian Beatty

Brian Beatty: This is Brian Beatty at the Creation Festival with first time visitor here to the festival, Rich Mullins. It's great to have you with us today.

> *Rich Mullins: Thanks, it's nice to be in the shade!*

BB: Actually, this is your first time as I mentioned to creation. What are you anticipating about your time tonight?

> *RM: Well, I don't know. I have no idea what to expect. That's kinda the fun thing about your first time is you kinda go, "Whew, what's this?"*

BB: Much of your music, Rich, is a very intimate sound, folk sounding, acoustic instruments. One that someone would sit and listen to in their living room. But you've got a setting here of forty to fifty thousand people. Is it kinda overwhelming? Do you think you're going to be able to reach the one on one? How's it feel from the stage?

> *RM: Well, from the stage, it's kinda the same whether you've got a thousand people or however many people are here. You can only see so many people in the course of an evening anyway. So I guess my approach is that I just try to sing to one person, no matter how many people are in the audience. 'Cause otherwise, I think I might get nervous*

BB: Creation festival is unique in that there are now parents that are bringing their children. Much of your music speaks across the generations. Why don't we speak about your writing styles. What has influenced you as a writer of your music?

> *RM: Well, you know, pretty much the same kinds of people that*

influenced everybody. I listened to all that pop junk when I was growing up, and of course I was affected by it. I was real fortunate to have somewhat of an education in music, which has been I think very helpful.

I think probably more than anything that has affected it is kindof that attitude of trying to enjoy life and receive it for what it is and.. That's kindof the answer I have about listening. You don't listen to reggae and expect the same thing as if you're listening to a waltz. And try to appreciate each different style and each thing for what it is and not expect it to be something it's not.

So then when I write a song, I think the biggest job of a writer is to keep himself open to the moment and not expect every song to.. A lot of times when you start writing a song, you don't really know what it's about. And you just have to have the guts to go with it and say, "Man, I'm not sure where I'm going here, but I'm just going to write it out." Then you get done and you play it for someone and you say, "Does that make any sense?" And they say, "I'm not sure it makes sense, but I think it's about this." And you go, "Yeah, that's exactly what it's about!"

BB: And your music has done that from album to album. It's almost like you go through a new culture each album and a new influence. Is that something you're purposely trying to do, to scope out and get influences from Appalachia or Celtic culture or Native American. How are you trying to best do that through your albums?

RM: Well, I think that's happening to me a lot of times personally. And then musically, it comes out musically. I try not to be too deliberate about music. I think it's more fun if it's sort of an accident.

BB: And rich, theologically, your music has been able to cross many denominational lines - to reach a broad base of people that are in the church. Much of your music is about grace. Speak about grace and what it means to you in your heart and God's love for you.

RM: Well, I think.. it would be hard to say anything about grace, because anything you'd say would be less than grace. You know, grace is a big thing.

> *I think one reason a lot of people don't experience grace is because they don't have any idea that they need it.*
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> *A while ago, I was kinda hacked off and I was kindof going, "God, why am I such a freak? Why couldn't I have been a good basketball player? I wanted to be a jock or something. Instead, I'm a musician. I feel like such a sissy all the time. Why couldn't I be just like a regular guy?"*
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> *The more I thought about it, the more I realized that you know sometimes God has things in mind for us that we can't even imagine. And I think that maybe it was good for me to grow up being picked on a little bit, because then I realized what it meant to be kinda the underdog. And then to have someone who is not an underdog, someone who is you know like God or something to say, "Hey, I want you to be with Me." Then you kinda go, "Wow!" And so maybe for that reason, grace is more important to me than people who have been able to more self-sufficient and all that sort of thing.*

BB: Speaking of God and your relationship with Him, there any other things that you enjoy writing about? There are certain times, certain periods of your life, in your relationship with Him that you like to put forth into your music?

> *RM: Well, I think, it's not a part of it that I particularly enjoy. A part that I find particularly spiritually vital is the emptiness of life, the utter futility of it. You know, I think a lot of people think it's morose when you sort of finally embrace that.*
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> *But I kinda go, once you come to understand that life is unbelievably brief, and that we really can't do anything that's gonna change anything. That we're sort of, that we don't really amount to a hill of beans. Then all of a sudden, you go, "So it doesn't really matter if I'm not great. And if I don't have to be great, that means I can fail. And if I can fail, that means I can try. And if I can try, that means I'm gonna have a good time." You know what I mean is? I mean I think it's the opposite... That the biblical approach to...*
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> *So many people at the end of the twentieth century in evangelical America have bought into the idea of believing in yourself and all that. Which I just kinda go, "Man, what would be more miserable*

than if I really thought that I was my greatest hope?" And what is more liberating than realizing that I am not the greatest hope I have. That in fact, there is a hope that is so great, so far beyond me that except for His grace, I would never experience it.

And I kinda go, it seems to me like the world believes that we're supposed to esteem ourselves, but the teachings of Jesus are that we're supposed to forget ourselves. And I think once we realize what a little gnat you really are, you're easier to for get. And so then it's way easier to say, so it doesn't really matter if I don't hit the ball, I'm gonna swing. It doesn't really matter if I don't get the ball in the hoop, I'm gonna shoot anyway. It doesn't really matter if the song that I'm writing isn't any good, I'm gonna write it anyway.

Because even if it's a flop, tomorrow morning the sun's gonna come up just the same. Even if it's a flop Tomorrow evening it's gonna get darker and darker, chances are there will be stars. The world will go right on no matter whether I succeed or fail. So I am suddenly free in a world of amazing possibilities. I can try anything I want to try, because nothing is really at stake. And all this stuff we get caught up in, the idea of prestige, money, people recognizing you on the street. All those th ings become pretty secondary.

BB: Bring us up to date with your life and your career. You've recently kinda graduated college, as it were. Give us an idea of what's going on.

RM: Yeah, I think I was probably the oldest guy in my graduating class. And it was a blast to be in college. And now I've moved out to Arizona, and I'm living among the Navajo people there.

You know, a lot of people think I'm going out there to try to work with the Navajo people and save 'em. But actually, I'm going out there hoping they can save me somehow. Somehow by being among a people who force me to look at life in different terms than those I've grown comfortable with, somehow maybe I will see something that I've missed.

BB: How is that impacting your heart through your music and what God is doing in introducing you to those people in this stage of your life. How is that impacting your music?

RM: Music is one of those things that changes more slowly than the rest - you know, the music follows. So, all I can tell you is you need to keep listening to the stuff I'm writing, 'cause probably ten years from now, the effects of this will become noticable.

BB: Speaking of your music, one of my favorite songs is "Damascus Road," and I do understand that that came out of a painful time in your life. Give us an idea of that time as you wrote that song.

RM: Yeah, I wrote that right after my ex-fiance called off our engagement, and I just sort of did it as an act of obedience. Because I was going, you know you're supposed to.. The hebrew people were required to say, "The Lord giveth, the Lord taketh away, blessed be the name of the Lord" when a tragedy happened. So I thought, well, you know I need to do something along those lines. So I decided to just thank God. It was sort of a writing exercise. But by the time I was over, what I realized was once again so often we think how our life is gonna go and what the Lord owes us and how it's supposed to be. And sometimes God has better things in mind or something different in mind for us than what we have in mind for ourselves.

And the job of the Christian, which is why writing is so much like praying, and why praying is so vital to a real Christian spiritual life. The job of a Christian is to keep themselves open to God and always recognize that God is greater than we are. And that nothing happens outside of His will. Some things He causes, some things He permits, and there's a whole lot of theology behind that that people love to argue about. I kinda go, the long and short of all of it is that if I believe that God is good, then I need to accept whatever happens to me in life as being a gift. And allow Him to take some of the things that hurt, allow Him to take some of the things that sting, some of the things that I think are going to kill me - allow Him to take those things and make of me the person He wants me to be. It may not be the person I want to be, but it'll be the person He would want me to be.

And I think when we realize who we are in Christ - when we mature in our identity as being His creature that we find that we're much more at home with ourselves in Him than we are in that false idea of

who we thought we were.

BB: Rich Mullins, thanks so much for being with us today.

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